

TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION  
1937-1976

**RECORD GROUP 82**

*PROCESSED BY:*

DAVID R. SOWELL  
ARCHIVAL TECHNICAL SERVICES  
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LOCATION: STACK 2

## INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee State Library and Archives received these photographs and negatives from the Department of Conservation in the early 1970s. Mr. Mack S. Prichard, State Archaeologist for Tennessee and an employee of the Department of Conservation, retrieved these records from the department and transferred them to TSLA. Jim Hoobler, an archivist for the State Library and Archives, accepted this collection for the Manuscripts Section, TSLA.

In the early 1980s, Mancil Johnson, an archivist at TSLA, created a preliminary subject index for the negatives in this collection. They were reprocessed in 1998-1999 by David R. Sowell with the indispensable and expert technical assistance of TSLA photographer Karina McDaniel and the extensive knowledge of Carol Roberts, TSLA conservator, who identified many photo subjects and provided invaluable background information on the provenance of the collection.

This record group is comprised of over 11,000 photographic images housed in eighty boxes, and some 21,000 negatives. These photographs were originally kept in fiberboard binders, arranged by subjects. During the processing of this collection, the photographs were removed from the binders and placed in translucent polyethylene sleeves. They were re-arranged into new subject series and placed in archival boxes. The photographs were catalogued onto a computer database (MS Access 97) for public access.

This record group is located in the environmentally-controlled vault at the State Library and Archives. The photographs are located on Row IX. The boxes of negatives are located on Row V. Many of the early negatives are of unstable content and are unusable due to deterioration. There are still many negatives of this type in this collection, and special consideration should be afforded to their use and preservation.

Any patron using the photographs in this collection should be discouraged from removing them from their protective polyethylene sleeves. Access to the photographic negatives should be limited to the photographic specialist at the State Library and Archives.

## NOTES ON ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY ON PROVENANCE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The Department of Conservation (TDOC) was created in 1937 “to work toward a program of restoration, development and conservation of our renewable and non-renewable natural resources.”<sup>1</sup> This new department assumed the responsibilities of the Forestry Division, the Game and Fish Commission, the Geology Division and the Hotel Inspection Division. Additionally, new divisions for state parks and state information were added to the department in 1939. A “Conservation Education Section” was established, under the direct supervision of the commissioner, to accumulate and disseminate information on the natural resources of Tennessee. A new magazine, *Tennessee Wildlife* (later *The Tennessee Conservationist*) was developed in cooperation with the Tennessee Federation of Sportsmen. This magazine was published to advertise and discuss sportsmen’s issues, conservation issues, and the culture and history of Tennessee. Along with the Department of Conservation, a Conservation Commission was created, consisting of six appointees, to advise the commissioner and provide oversight of the department and other conservation issues in Tennessee. Sam F. Brewster was appointed by Gov. Gordon Browning as the first Commissioner of Conservation in Tennessee.

In 1937, TDOC hired Paul A. Moore as a photographer to serve all divisions of the department. Moore had been a photographer for the Tennessee Valley Authority. He and James L. Bailey established the procedures for the Division of Education Services at TDOC and set the standard for the quality photography of the division over the years.

Moore was the first of the photographers to be hired for the Education Section, but his work load increased such that several other photographers were hired in the ensuing years. These photographers included Wallace Danley, Al Marsh, Dan Grice, Bill Shipley, Bob Ferguson, Dave Murrian, Bill Cox, Aubrey Watson, Charles Jackson, George Hornal, Jim Robertson and Tim Frazier (the final photographer to be hired by TDOC; Frazier left the department in 1980).

David Murrian had been an audio-visual supervisor with the Tennessee Game and Fish Commission. A tale in the department was that Murrian was on assignment at Center Hill Lake, and was taking underwater photographs relating to boat safety. A piece of scientific equipment fell into the lake, and Murrian dove to the bottom to retrieve it. He nearly drowned from the experience due to his contracting the “bends” after diving to a depth of almost 150 feet. He recovered after spending nearly two weeks in a decompression chamber in Florida.

The duties of the staff photographers in the Department of Conservation were widely varied. One day a staff photographer would be assigned to “shoot” landscape shots in Williamson County; the next day he might be charged with photographing events in the governor’s office at the State Capitol. The photographs in this collection were not only printed in *The Tennessee Conservationist*, but also used throughout state government—in tourism brochures, annual reports, and presentations. They were even used for displays at county fairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Tennessee Secretary of State, *Tennessee Blue Book, 1937-1938*, (Nashville, 1938), page 127.

In 1976, the General Assembly created the Department of Tourism, and also developed the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (formerly the Game and Fish Commission). With the creation of TWRA and its own publication, this diminished the need for the Department of Conservation to maintain its' photographic unit. Budget cuts to the department sealed the photographic unit's fate. By 1980, the unit had been closed down. Today, *The Tennessee Conservationist* relies on freelance photographers and other sources.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

Record Group 82 is an important visual resource for the study of the history and culture of the State of Tennessee in the mid-Twentieth Century. This collection is the archive of the photographic unit of the Tennessee Department of Conservation. Along with over 21,000 negatives, the collection has more than 11,000 photographs divided into thirty-three series. Most of the photographs have been sorted by the original negative number given by the staff photographers at TDOC. When this collection was processed, it became apparent that the negative numbers corresponded with the chronological history of the photographic unit. This means that the first negative numbers were from the department's early days in the late 1930s, and the last negatives (#18,000-#20,000) are from the mid-1970s. Additional photographs from other sources are also included in this collection. Occasionally, the *Conservationist* staff would rely on photographs from others sources such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, newspapers, and other entities. Those photographs have been added to each series and documentation to their origin is noted, if known.

These photographs contain a superb visual history of Tennessee from the late 1930s to the 1970s. Included are images of famous individuals such as several Tennessee governors and other state officials, U.S. Senator Albert Gore, Sr., musical performer Elvis Presley, film star Andy Devine, Sgt. Alvin C. York, U.S. presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson, various performers from the Grand Ole Opry, Miss Universe of 1965—Aspasra Hongsakula of Thailand, and Queen Juliana of the Netherlands.

Series 4, Arts, Crafts and Folklife, contains many wonderful photographs of mountain people in East Tennessee; many of these images show these people engaging in the crafts that maintained their way of life in the hills. Among these individuals are “Uncle” George Lamons of Sevier County, “Aunt” Liza Reagan of Gatlinburg, Wiley Gibson—the “famous gunsmith of Sevier County,” the WSM Radio Country Band and Square Dancers performing at McMinnville, Tenn., mountain weavers near Spencer, Tennessee, and famous Smoky Mountain guide Wiley Oakley, Sr. (photos of Mr. Oakley are also located in Series 17, Great Smoky Mountains).

Series 27, State Parks, contains an extensive documentary history of the state parks in Tennessee, from their development in 1938 to the 1970s. Many state parks were developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.), and there are photographs of several of the C.C.C. camps and projects in Tennessee during the 1930s. Cumberland Mountain State Park, Montgomery Bell State Park, Pickett State Park, Harrison Bay State Park, and T. O. Fuller State Park are among them.

Series 29, Tours of Tennessee, has photographs of the promotional “See Tennessee Tour” of the state by the Newspapers Editors of America, sponsored by the Department of Conservation. This tour visited many historic and cultural areas of Tennessee, including the Hermitage, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Humboldt Strawberry Festival, the Shiloh National Military Park, and other locations in the state.

In 1948 and for many years afterward, the Nashville *Tennessean* sponsored a boat flotilla cruise on the Tennessee River to promote tourism along the river. It was referred to as the “Tennessee Valley HO!” cruise. This cruise would begin in Paducah, Kentucky, and

end in the upper eastern part of Tennessee. It would stop along the river at various locations where special publicity were held. There are many photographs of this cruise in Series 29, Tours of Tennessee.

There are a large number of photographic slides in Record Group 82. Most of these slides have been traced to an audio-visual presentation by the State Department of Economic and Community Development. They include images of Humphreys County, Tennessee, Bristol, Tennessee, and Kingsport, Tennessee. It is not certain that these slides are truly a part of the TDOC photo archive. However, the subjects for these slides were similar enough to the photographs from TDOC that it was decided to keep them in the collection.

Each series in this record group contains many wonderful photographs. Much of this collection's artistic quality rivals that of more famous photographic collections found elsewhere in the U.S. It has been stated by many who have used this collection that its importance to Tennessee history is comparable to photographs of the Farm Service Administration, held in the Library of Congress.

#### Sources:

Davis, Marge. "Talking Pictures: State Photographers Remember the Good Old Days." The Tennessee Conservationist Nov.-Dec. 1998: 10-13.

Hoobler, James Allen. Personal interview. 8 Feb. 2000.

Johnson, Mancil. Personal interview. 7 Feb. 2000.

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